

Fremont leaders, congressmen tout city's tech companies, planned Warm Springs BART development

By Chris De Benedetti The Argus

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A section of Stevenson Boulevard is closed to traffic, as crews install a temporary bridge so...



FREMONT -- Trying to transform its image from an overlooked bedroom community to a Silicon Valley player, the city is focusing on a swath of undeveloped land at its southern edge as a site for new housing and tech jobs.

To fulfill that ambitious vision, Fremont leaders must forge a creative partnership with transit agencies, businesses and state and federal officials -- which is why those disparate groups gathered Thursday at the Fremont Legislative Brunch.

"If anyone wants to get something done in the city of Fremont, this room would be the place," Mayor Bill Harrison quipped, kicking off the two-hour event at Tesla's Warm Springs district campus.

Fremont has several projects it wants to get done. Topping that list is developing 850 acres of commercial, retail and residential uses around Tesla, the electric car manufacturer, and next to the Warm Springs/South Fremont BART station, which is expected to open in 2015. The city hopes to add about 3,000 housing units and 12,000 jobs to the area, building on Fremont's growing reputation as a biotech and cleantech hub.

"We're going to leverage the heck out of this transit-oriented development in Warm Springs," said Kelly Kline, Fremont's economic development director.

The project is expected to be built in several phases over the next 25 to 30 years. It is still in its infancy, but progress slowly is being made, the event's speakers said.

Union Pacific Railroad has sold

22 acres to Thermo Fisher Scientific, a biotech company that is expected to open its office in the area next year. Union Pacific also plans to sell 109 acres north of the plant. Brochures soon will be sent to local real estate agents branding that undeveloped area as "Innovation Village," an attempt to make it synonymous with the entrepreneurial creativity for which Silicon Valley is famous.

City officials said they aim to market south Fremont better, noting that it already is home of Tesla, 80 biotech companies and 30 cleantech and solar-energy companies such as Sora and Solaria.

Some of those efforts are already paying off, Kline said. In October, Fremont will host the Western Region Cleantech Open, in which dozens of companies and entrepreneurs submit their environmentally friendly tech ideas in a competition for cash prizes. It was held in Dublin last year, she said.

"We want to have more innovation-centered events and workshops," Kline said before the brunch. "That doesn't happen a whole lot now, but we're trying to change that."

Kline said Fremont also wants to regain manufacturing jobs that the state has lost overseas in recent decades. U.S. Reps. Mike Honda and Eric Swalwell -- each of whom represent part of Fremont -- said manufacturing jobs would bolster the state's dwindling middle class. Swalwell praised Fremont officials for doggedly lobbying federal representatives for funds to be spent on the Warm Springs development.

One of its first public works projects would be the construction of a bridge that would connect the BART station's west entrance to the rest of the development. Early estimates say the bridge would cost about \$30 million, but that is subject to change, said Jim Pierson, Fremont's public works director.

Environmental reports and design work have not been started, Pierson said. But it's never too early to start identifying government funding and grants, which explains the city's recent lobbying of Congress.

"I'm impressed with Fremont's federal advocacy program," Swalwell said. "It's been a full, robust program to put Fremont's issues on our burner in Washington, D.C."

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